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Thursday August 17, 2017

emPOWERed

Not wanting to waste the opportunity his godmother gave him to pull himself out of poverty, François Vibert battled through his darkness to earn a Fulbright scholarship he hopes will enable him to provide the gift of light to his native Haiti.

"My parents were very poor and my mother wasn't well, so my godmother took me in, raised me and worked to send me to private schools," Vibert said. "I would still be in Haiti doing who knows what, if not for my godmother. She knew I always had a dream, and I couldn't jeopardize the opportunity she gave me. So, I studied a lot."

But sometimes he didn't have any electricity to study. That meant walking "many kilometers to find light to study.

"It fueled my interest in doing something to help."

Vibert eventually found his way to the University of Dayton master's program in renewable and clean energy via an engineering school in Cuba. In between, he returned to Haiti to work in a power plant and volunteer with a social service agency focusing on housing.

As a UD student, he's keeping busy working with mechanical and aerospace engineering professor Kevin Hallinan on cost-effective models to provide electricity in Haiti using solar energy and interning at Fairfield, Ohio-based SonLight Power. SonLight Power is a faith-based non-profit organization providing sustainable energy solutions, knowledge and skills to help people in developing areas gain independence from energy poverty. This summer, Vibert was part of a SonLight Power team that installed a solar power project near Campton, Kentucky.

His eventual goal is to return to Haiti, launch a startup and bring solar energy to his compatriots. The Fulbright Foreign Student Program brings citizens of other countries to the U.S. for graduate study. Many

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foreign Fulbright grantees are early-career professionals who will return to take leadership positions in their home countries, often working at universities or in government service.

"I want to help people, especially the underprivileged," Vibert said. "I'm not a rich man but I can share my knowledge. I can help guide people."

SonLight Power Executive Director Kevin Sasson said he feels crossing Vibert's path during a talk at UD's School of Engineering was meant to be.

"It's supernatural. There's no other way to describe how everything unfolded for us to connect, other than it was a God-thing," he said. "Just think of the sequence of events that had to happen for François and SonLight Power to meet in Dayton, Ohio, of all places. And the precise fit between the SonLight Power mission and François' interests in applying clean energy to improve the quality of life in Haiti. All of it, it's not a coincidence."

Started in 2009, the University of Dayton renewable and clean energy graduate program focuses on energy-efficient buildings and manufacturing, and solar, wind, geothermal, biofuel and fuel-cell energy engineering. The program continues to attract students from around the globe, with applications annually three times that of seats available.

Students have the opportunity to participate in more than \$18 million of energy-related research the University performs within the School of Engineering, the College of Arts and Sciences and the University of Dayton Research Institute or hands-on sustainability learning through the University's Hanley Sustainability Institute.

Visit the related links to learn more about how become a student in the University of Dayton's renewable and clean energy graduate program, supporting the University's sustainability initiatives, visit the related links.

For more information or interviews, contact Shawn Robinson, associate director of news and communications, at 937-229-3391 or srobinson1@udayton.edu, or Kevin Sasson, SonLight Power executive director, at 513- 285-9960 or Kevin@SonLightPower.org.

contract for research and development in AFRL's Quick-Reaction Evaluation of Materials and Processes program.

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